

The Roots of the Roundup

By Donna Anderson

Lehi City boasts a long and colorful history of rodeo. The first rodeo was held in conjunction with the 24th of July celebration in the year 1927. The news report reads: "The promise of a rodeo in Lehi is creating a real stir in town".

Stan Clark, Hyrum Anderson, Elmer Jackson, A. E. Anderson, and Ruel and Noble Evans organized the events which started at 1:30 p.m. It was held on the present site of the rodeo grounds. The committee boasted, "They would have the best riding talent in the Intermountain West, including both Cowboys and Indians." They were not wrong! The account tells us that whole families of Indians came to town to participate in both the rodeo and the parade, and the cowboys displayed skill in sticking on the horses and furnishing the spectators more thrills per minute than a "whole army of Tom Mix's and Doug Fairbanks."

The first rodeo showed the dangers of the sport when an Indian Buck got his foot caught in the stirrup and was dragged. He was taken to the hospital and treated for a fractured shoulder and a cut over his eye. True to cowboy spirit, though, he did not spend any time in the hospital but left the same evening.

From the accounts of this rodeo, tradition took shape and has continued down in the present day. Many changes have taken place, from parked cars forming the arena to the modern chutes and bleachers of today. Stan Clark recalls, "We didn't have a corral to put the sock in so we would have to saddle a horse in front of the audience, get the cowboy mounted, lead him out in front of the crowd and let him go. Acting as pick-up man, I had to follow the rider until his ride was through and try to catch the horse and let the cowboy off." George Lewis remembers that two or three people from Lehi also rode in that rodeo. Nels Otterson was an excellent rider, according to George. "They were paid \$5 to ride, and since they were paid performers, no 'Prizes' were given. This rodeo was preceded by a stock parade in which everyone was invited to ride."

Dale Peterson rode calves in that first rodeo at the ripe old age of 13. He returned the next year (actually 1930) riding bareback horses and steers. IN 1930, the rodeo was held in a wild grass field on Israel Evans' property west of the city limits. Joseph Anderson was the chairman. Bleachers were built as well as corrals and chutes for stock. A rancher from Garland, Utah, Jack Rich was hired to put on the show. He brought 60 horses and several cowboys.

One of the unusual events of that rodeo was the wild cow milking contest. Six pairs of men and six cows took part. One man was supposed to rope and hold the cow while his partner milked the cow into a "sodie-water" bottle. This contest was wild and the audience applauded with enthusiasm. However, the cowboys found themselves battered and bruised and the cows seemed to be the winners.

Jack Rich brought with him a big black horse coiled "Black Diamond," a horse that never been riders. Jonnie Slater, like other determined cowboys attempted to ride him but he was too was unloaded. But Matt Cropper, from Deseret, Utah, came to calf-rope and bulldog. One of the highlights of that show was his bay horse, Sailor. Matt and his horse were unforgettable when they performed. Dale Peterson tells of one act of this rodeo he has never forgotten. "A girl was was a professional rider, got on a horse that bucked so hard it must'a broke the hooks on her bra because it fell onto the grounds. A cowboy nearby in a black hat, picked it up, put in his hat and left the arena."

Dale also recalls that Freddie Hunt from Idaho sang the song, "Strawberry Roan" for the first time here in Lehi. He became famous as a western song writer and singer but for some time after the rodeo, everyone in Lehi was singing, "I'm doing my best to ride that Strawberry Roan".

In 1933, Charles "Slats" Jacobs came to town to do his first rodeoing. He states the he followed Doc Sorenson's string of shows. He produced the rodeo that year, and I came with him. I was riding broncs, bareback horses, bulldogging and bull riding. Slats also remembers that Matt Cropper was there at that rodeo and

he was the “best haze I ever had.” Other top cowboys appearing that year was Dave Campbell, world champion bulldogger and Homer Pettegrew , world champion calf roper.